

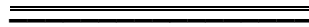
**The Bill Blackwood
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Armed Educators in the Texas Public School System



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

Around the country, seemingly without rhyme or reason, active shooter/assailant events occur with regularity. Although there is some indication this phenomenon is on the rise, the sample size is relatively small statistically speaking (2000 - 2017). What has become evident is the average death toll per event continues to rise. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), 2017 demonstrated a 34 percent increase (138) in fatalities from the next highest year of 90 fatalities (Hays, 2018, para 2). This is in large part a result of more intricate planning, offenders studying previous active shooter events (copy cats), different mindsets (trying to one-up the last offender), weapon choice and subsequent platforms, and numerous other considerations (Hayes, 2018, para 4).

The innocent lives tragically taken is unacceptable; active shooter incidents decimate families and communities alike without prejudice. These events consistently raise more questions than answers and are typically only exceeded in tragedy by the next active shooter event. Further, these events shock the conscience of America as a whole, not just family members of the victims. That said, more proactive approaches to addressing these tragedies needs to be seriously pursued if our collective goal is to minimize fatalities when these tragedies occur. One would be remiss to accept these events as the cost of doing business. More aptly, risks we are willing to accept for our Nation's children and education staff. For these reasons and many others, select and vetted educators in the Texas public school system should be armed.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost without question, the greatest concern for a society is the safety and well-being of its children. This holds true in most cases even for those without children, as well. When a fundamental value such as the safety of children is called into question, most experience a sense of vulnerability. Left in the wake is the concern of further deterioration to values our society places a premium on, not to mention, one's own safety and mortality. This sentiment seems to be the only constant in the immediate aftermath of a school shooting.

There exists much to debate on the topic; school shootings are on the rise, they have become deadlier now (modern era of school shootings beginning with Columbine) than pre-1999, response times have increased, the school systems are training appropriately and consistently, school marshals, and so much more. Equally, there exists much to debate within each of the threads above pertaining to the topic. That said, it seems only reasonable to establish a couple of parameters when discussing this phenomenon.

First, the consensus seems to be centered on one concern above all others, protecting the children attending the schools. More aptly, reducing the number of tragic fatalities associated with active shooter/active assailant school-related situations. Second, response time is paramount in accomplishing the first. Few, if any, would argue otherwise for either assertion, particularly when they are vehemently supported nationwide with hard data. Since the Columbine tragedy, largely considered the modern era of active shooting events, law enforcement has done a 180 in its collective response. For example, pre-1999 a perimeter would be taken up and special

operations called in to engage the assailant(s); post-1999, acknowledging the importance for early engagement of the offender, law enforcement now makes entry upon the arrival of the first officer (Sanchez, 2018, para. 6).

Debating increases or decreases in school shootings undermines the importance of protecting the children and staff so often fatally affected. If one can table the outside noise detracting from the conversation and focus on when (not if) they occur, how to minimize the tragic loss of life, perhaps productive dialogue and subsequent, equally productive, action can take place. For this to happen, one must inventory what is known about this phenomenon, which is rather finite. First, 60% of the time these tragic events are over prior to law enforcement's arrival (U.S. DOJ, 2013, p. 6), averaging nearly 12.5 minutes in length (Murgado, 2013, para. 1). Wherein, the national average response time for law enforcement is approximately 18 minutes, or roughly six minutes after the carnage has stopped (Murgado, 2013, para. 1). Lastly, one's chance for survival is significantly increased upon challenging the assailant (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2008).

Much in the same vein, the core curriculum for the Civilian Response to Active Shooter encourages no longer hiding or "playing dead" when the threat becomes imminent. In fact, encouraging just the opposite, engage the assailant for greater chances of survival (ALERT, n.d.). It is seemingly counter-intuitive to instruct business entities to engage an active assailant to increase survival rates, but not to do so in a place of learning; altogether suggesting this philosophy is not transferable.

As previously stated, if the consensus is protecting children, and it is modeled repeatedly that engaging the offender sooner rather than later minimizes the carnage,

then a paradigm shift is ultimately required in this arena. The likely contention being the preferred course of action would be the placement of an officer in every school.

However, that is not seriously being discussed as a realistic option at this time for most schools. It becomes evident there is one group who find themselves “standing in the gap.” Not wanting to diminish the role of educator and replace it with the role of warrior, but desperate events begat desperate measures. More aptly, one would be remiss to put educators in a box. As such, select and vetted educators in the Texas Public School system should be armed.

POSITION

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act authorizing an increase of 100,000 municipal police officers for the purpose of community policing as a result of the crack cocaine epidemic and subsequent gang violence (U.S. DOJ, 1994, para. 1). Short of a similar act with the intent of increasing officers for the sole purpose of staffing one for every public school in the country, which is not on the table, alternative solutions must be considered in the interim. Much in the same vein, most opponents support the notion of one school resource officer for every public school, assuming funding were made available through an outside source rather than the districts, (Chrusciel, Wolfe, Hansen, Kaminski, & Rojek, 2014). For this reason, select and vetted educators in the Texas public school system should be armed.

“Select” educators in no way suggests “selected.” Rather, it simply refers to those volunteering to be armed, would be vetted and summarily selected upon requisite criteria being met. To impose otherwise would breed dysfunction, discord, resistance,

resentment, and likely increase the propensity for negative fallout surrounding the initiative.

There is an inherent deterrent factor, albeit one lacking concrete measurability, for recognizing a school as having armed staff. Insomuch as a home with a dog, advertised security system, video surveillance, or a combination therein aids in deterring would-be burglars; the same logic would very likely hold true for schools. The caveat here is measuring said deterrence considering a crime not committed is difficult to measure, if not altogether impossible. Posit asking all homeowners to remove the previously mentioned deterrent components from said domiciles and embrace for resistance. This concept runs counter to conventional wisdom to suggest having deterrents in place, placebo or otherwise, is not beneficial to the stakeholder. This theory holds true when one considers most, if not all, active shooters seek the sensationalism often found surrounding these types of incidents.

More aptly, the assailant likely desires to be met with as little resistance as possible early on, in an effort to perpetrate as much carnage as possible, intent on becoming infamous or being immortalized in the sick circle of active shooter want-to-be'. In short, one-upping the latest tragedy. Thus, the "don't name them" campaign incorporated in Active Shooter and Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) training (ALERT, n.d.). Whereby authorities desire not to "promote" the infamy of the perpetrator, rather provide reverence to the courageous survivors and sadly, remorse for the innocent victims and families. Increasing the difficulty for arguing the point, few academic studies or literature reviews exist on deterrence theory in relation to active school shootings (Crawford & Burns, 2015).

Law enforcement, upon recognizing areas for improvement after the 1999 Columbine tragedy, have re-evaluated and subsequently introduced new training methods for responding to such events. Many include, but are not limited to, approaches and entrance to the building, tactics involved, weaponry, and mindset. The last being the most profound and significant to the first responder. Inasmuch as, law enforcement's mindset must, and should be, to end the threat, minimizing the loss of life. The contention, simply stated, is the faster the response and subsequent engagement of the offender, the sooner the active shooter event is ended. Thus, the prevention of more lives lost. More aptly, find the perpetrator, engage the perpetrator, and end the perpetrator. Although this may seem callous to some, likely those opposed to arming educators or equally opposed to 2nd Amendment rights, it remains the requisite mindset for, not only preparation in route to the scene, but sustained upon arrival and culminating with ending said threat.

There exists a causal relationship between the prolonged existence of one committing the violence and increased fatalities of children and staff. This is the argument where the dialogue should begin and end; minimizing fatalities. The narrative on both sides unequivocally surrounds averting tragedy associated with senseless killings. Literature, after-action reviews, academia, and experts in this arena all support the supposition that early engagement of the offender accomplishes just this (Blair, Nichols, Burns, & Curnutt, 2013). Inherently there are risks; however, there are greater risks and to greater numbers of innocent potential victims by standing down, hiding and hoping. To introduce other arguments only diminishes the alleged priority of saving lives when these events occur.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Opponents of armed educators often argue the safety surrounding concealment of a weapon in, not only a classroom environment, but school facilities and associated functions. Insomuch as there exists a greater propensity for an accidental discharge, misplacement, theft, or questionable mental health of the educator carrying. Often asserting an increase in weapons on school grounds increases the propensity for accidental discharges. Suggesting in its stead, to increase training in the identification of potential threats. Further, should a teacher suffer from an undiagnosed mental illness coupled with unrestricted access to a concealed weapon, the outcome would yield similar results to any other active shooter. Insomuch as no safeguards would be in place to mitigate a faculty member from having a bad day.

Additionally, an argument is posed for concerns surrounding misplacement or theft, referencing two recent incidents where guns were inadvertently left in restrooms. Altogether suggesting these weapons could then be commandeered and used to facilitate a mass shooting (Hennessy-Fiske, 2018). Similarly, it is suggested guns may benefit teachers in the event a school shooting occurs however, teachers would still be carrying guns to sporting events, conferences, and all other school functions increasing the likelihood for accidental shootings (Kiernan, 2016, para 6).

This argument is found lacking on any number of fronts. First, the only known or reported accidental discharges to date have occurred from teachers (two in 2018) not authorized to carry a concealed gun and altogether uncommon when one considers the possible number of teachers carrying in this capacity (Hennessy-Fiske, 2018).

Opponents' concerns surrounding the misplacement of guns is only supported by two

other reported incidents whereby both students left their weapons in the restroom. Notably, both students, not faculty, attended universities authorizing concealed carry. Ironically, Roosevelt's assertion that guns may benefit teachers in the event a school shooting occurs defeats the concerns for accidental shootings as school shootings are the issue currently at hand (Kiernan, 2016, para. 6).

Lastly, few factors would preclude an educator, for that matter, any employee or student of a school district, suffering from an "undiagnosed mental illness", from bringing and subsequently using a weapon to commit a mass shooting now. In this scenario, opponents here have just described the basis for this conversation. More aptly, most of the actors involved in school shootings to date have suffered from a mental illness, diagnosed or otherwise, brought a weapon to campus, and perpetrated a mass shooting (Metzl, & MacLeish, 2014, para. 7).

The propensity for these types of incidents to occur would diminish greatly upon the completion of state mandated training for educators. Inasmuch as, Texas statute as of 2013 mandates a minimum of 80 hours training for school marshals (Tex. Occ. Code 1701, 2017). Whereby this training emphasizes school shooting prevention, safety of victims, legal issues, use of force, proficiency, and responses. Additionally, school marshals must successfully complete a psychological examination and a minimum of 16 hours of continuing education to be re-licensed upon expiration (Tex. Occ. Code 1701, 2017).

Further, opponents take a risk versus reward stance as it relates to educators challenging an active shooter assailant. In that the risk to the educator is not worth the reward when one considers the realistic threat engagement an educator can provide

compared to that of law enforcement. More aptly, teachers did not sign up to stand in harm's way, rather to provide an education. Opponents here suggest students are better served when educators are not tasked with being first responders as well. Ari Freilich, a San Francisco-based staff attorney with the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence states "many teachers are already overwhelmed and that asking them to be first responders too is not in the interest of students" (Hennessy-Fiske, 2018, para. 3). This sentiment is lamented time and again largely by those opposed to guns anywhere.

In a similar vein, the argument is made for educators not being up to the task of challenging and subsequently thwarting an active shooter assailant. Inasmuch as, the mindset requisite to engaging an offender does not run parallel to educating and nurturing students. Similarly, teachers lack the training necessary to execute a successful assault against an armed offender. Arguing law enforcement is the most qualified for tasks of this nature. Further, shooting proficiently while qualifying at the local firing range in no way suggests having the tactical wherewithal handling weapons during these types of events (Hartocollis & Fortin, 2018).

Admittingly, Freilich's supposition that asking educators to also serve as first responders is not in the best interest of the students holds true in a perfect world. However, reality offers a different set of rules altogether, largely the kind most would prefer not to play by sans the choice to do otherwise. The primary issue with Freilich's assertion being it runs counter to what absolutely needs to happen when students are actively "hunted", shot and killed. That being the early engagement of the assailant. Recall almost 50 percent, aggregated, commit suicide or become incapacitated upon

being engaged (Lankford, 2015). Additionally, almost 60% of active school shootings are over prior to law enforcements arrival as previously noted (U.S. DOJ, 2013, p. 6). So it follows, these situations demand someone within the education system to take immediate action to end the innocent killing of students and staff. Admittingly, law enforcement remains the most qualified for serving in this capacity. However, until there is an officer assigned to every school, the likelihood of law enforcement arriving in sufficient time to address the assailant remains approximately 30 percent.

The second issue with this opinion is just that, it remains an opinion rather than a consensus. One requirement for qualification as a consensus being unanimity. The latter is most certainly found lacking in this arena. Rather, there are teachers in every district across the country volunteering to serve as “school marshals.” Further, if one educator asserts they would volunteer, comments to the contrary only serve to diminish that opinion and relegate that educator’s stance to one without relevance.

Lastly, one should consider the Latin phrase in *loco parentis*, or in the place of parents; altogether referencing a teacher or other administrator’s responsibility to children. In the school system, this is widely understood as referring to legal matters for a child when the parents or guardians are not available. Arguably this phrase becomes equally as applicable when it comes to protecting them. As one would be hard pressed to find a parent openly admitting they would not “stand in the gap” for a child or for another’s child for that matter as observed at Parkwood. Whereby slain Assistant Football Coach and hero, Aaron Feis “stood in the gap”, unarmed between the assailant and his students. This narrative of purporting it to be unfair to ask teachers to put

themselves in harm's way is negated by countless educators pleading to have the ability to do just that when the sanctity of schools is called into question.

RECOMMENDATION

Putting the proverbial genie back in the bottle is not an option as it relates to eradicating mass school shootings. Simply wanting this phenomenon to cease will not yield the results preferred by opponents and proponents alike. There exists little to no data suggesting school shootings are on the rise when viewed historically. In the same thread, there is less data suggesting they are on the decline while viewed with the same lens. That said, conventional wisdom here suggests threats will continue to exist. What remains is the tough decision-making process and subsequent action, as inactivity and indecisiveness is rarely the answer.

Paramount to this conversation should be the contention on both sides of the debate surrounds a mutual desire to keep children safe at school. This contention suggests there exists a common ground to start from even if this starting point means working backward to address the issue. More aptly, reverse engineering, in no way introducing a new concept. With all parties recognizing the end goal, one must consider actionable steps necessary to yield desired results. In doing so, fuzzy logic, artificial intelligence, anomalies, and outliers must be ignored. As previously noted 60% of all mass school shootings have ended prior to law enforcements arrival. Moreover, roughly 48% of assailants commit suicide or are incapacitated upon being confronted by someone leveling a similar threat of force (U.S. DOJ, 2013, p. 6). In short, in an overwhelming majority of these tragic events, local law enforcement is not a factor.

These two tenants can no longer be ignored and must remain at the forefront of further dialogue here. Worth noting again, placing a police officer in every public school in the country would likely offer the greatest results as it relates. As this option is currently not available nor viable, it remains off the table. At this juncture, it seems only reasonable to take a more concerted and academic look at arming teachers.

Upon collectively arriving at this juncture, it should go without saying intentions here do not surround arming just *any*, or for that matter all educators. Rather, seeking legitimate volunteers within the schools. Worth noting here, if no volunteers come forward, one would be remiss to mandate such a responsibility. Mandating an educator come forward for an assignment of this magnitude would certainly do more harm than good and likely yield negative, if not altogether catastrophic, results as it relates to opponents' charges in this area. Current literature here suggests this will not be an issue, as numerous educators have reached out to respective law makers expressing desires to carry at school (Turkewitz, 2018).

Assuming one or more *legitimate* volunteers come forward, the next seemingly logical step would be vetting said volunteer(s). Any number of metrics could and should be used here to include physical fitness evaluations, psychological evaluations, and background checks akin to those conducted for law enforcement, to name just a few. Paramount here being the identification of traits indicative of one who would assume appropriate action in a crisis of this magnitude. Many of which might include an individual that is regimented, a self-starter, organized, mentally (not from a psychological view as that is already being addressed) and physically fit to the extent

one would have confidence in a timely response. Seemingly not tangible, rather something one knows when observed in aggregate.

Successful completion of the previously mentioned conditions would lend itself to the training component. Arguably the most important as many educators would successfully pass a psychological exam and background check very similar to those levied on law enforcement applicants; likely already instituted for current hiring standards in the education sector. This must not be an afterthought, nor taken lightly. Individual states should set standards essential to their respective needs. As previously mentioned, Texas has a blue print, as several other states do, outlining training requirements and continued education. To not consider arming educators as a viable option only flies in the face of the Coach Feis' of the world and hundreds, if not thousands, of students that have lost their lives during these tragic events.

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